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Mystery of the missing millions

Eye general who ran Iran-to-Nicaragua web

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THE SEARCH for the missing millions from the Iran arms deal is centering upon a private network of mercenaries and "cowboys" headed by the mysterious figure of Maj. Gen. Richard Secord.

The Justice Dept. has opened an investigation into the network that used the proceeds from the Iranian deal to supply arms to the contras in Nicaragua.

Secord — who had access to the Swiss bank accounts that held the proceeds from the Iran deals — was directly involved in shipping arms both to Iran and the contras.

The Iran-to-Nicaragua network was run by Secord, who has had close links to CIA turncoat Edwin Wilson, who sold huge amounts of arms to Libya.

He had help from less powerful groups operated by retired Gen. John Singlaub and Max Gomez, a Cuban-American with links to Vice President George Bush.

All three are targets of the probe by Attorney General Edwin Meese.

Also under investigation are rumors that money was skimmed from the Swiss bank accounts.

The network was orchestrated at the White House level by Marine Lt. Col. Oliver North, who was fired from the National Security Council staff for his role in the growing scandal.

Although North is also being investigated, Secord has emerged as the central figure in the money-laundering operation.

Secord, allegedly acting on behalf of North, was the "cut-out" in the money-laundering scheme — he orchestrated the covert operation from a distance.

The Post learned yesterday that Secord accompanied North and former National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane on a trip to Tehran last May on a plane loaded with U.S. arms.

Secord — or someone acting for him — withdrew unknown amounts of the Iran arms money from the Swiss bank accounts.

The cash was then transmitted to Portugal, where Secord and his group used the funds to purchase arms for the contras.

The arms were then shipped to insurgent bases in Honduras and El Salvador.

One of those shipments was aboard the supply plane that was recently shot down, leading to the capture of flier Eugene Hasenfus by Nicaraguan government troops, according to Justice Dept. sources.

Secord, a West Pointer and much-decorated combat pilot, is said to be a business associate of Albert Hakim, an Iranian who used to supply the shah's secret police with all its equipment.

Secord could not be reached for comment yesterday at his business office at Stanford Technology in Reston, Va.

Secord is president of the firm, an arms shipping company not far from CIA headquarters. He was hired by Stanford when he left government service.

Stanford was founded by Hakim, who pleaded guilty in 1981 in federal court in Virginia with an ex-CIA agent for his role in a \$9 million fraud involving a \$1 billion arms sales by the Pentagon to Egypt.

"Secord is an unknowable

man," a former highly placed U.S. official, who worked with Secord on arms deals with Saudi Arabia, said yesterday.

"He's very reserved, very aloof, very private."

A former deputy assistant secretary of Defense, Secord played a key role in convincing senators to sell AWACS radar planes to the Saudis in 1981.

According to the former U.S. official, Secord worked on the Saudi deal with Col. Robert Lilac, who now works for Saudi Prince Bandar in Washington.

Although working for the same cause as retired officers aiding the contras, Secord and Singlaub are bitter enemies.

"The difference is between the ideologue [Singlaub] and the businessman [Secord]," a source close to the contra connection said yesterday.

They do not speak to each other. Their offices make a point of not keeping in touch with each other.

Joyce Downey, spokesman for Singlaub's group, the U.S. Council for World Freedom, said about Secord:

"I've heard his name mentioned a hundred times in a hundred ways, but I've never spoken to him."

She described Secord as "a maneuverer, someone who manipulates."

She described Singlaub as "a great man of integrity, but not a businessman."

Secord was the target of the same grand jury investigation that led to the jailing of Wilson for sending arms to Libya.

The Pentagon suspended him for his ties to Wilson, but later reinstated him.

Secord was Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger's chief arms sales advisor for the Mideast before he left government service. He was temporarily removed

from the post pending a lie detector test because he was being investigated by the FBI for his role in the Wilson affair.

Secord never took the polygraph, according to writer Peter Maas, author of "Manhunt," a book about the Wilson probe.

According to the book, Secord met Wilson after he returned from flying missions during the CIA's secret war in Laos. He was introduced to Wilson by two veteran CIA officials.

Wilson also helped Secord out when a house Secord bought as an investment was threatening his financial position.

Wilson took the house off Secord's hands. Wilson also let Secord use his vacation house.

The close lipped Secord recently told an interviewer:

"If you asked me, was I an adviser on arms imports to Iran, that's another matter. I can't talk about that.

"Do you know my resume? Then you know I worked for Cap Weinberger and I know a lot about Iran."

Secord was first linked to the Hasenfus operation when his unlisted home phone number was found in phone records from the safe house where Hasenfus lived in El Salvador.